

GIVING TO HELP GOD'S WORK

Look up Luke 21: 1-4.

Add missing words to complete the story.



One day when Jesus was at the Temple, He saw some _____ men putting their _____ of money into the treasury.

Then he saw a _____ woman who had no husband. This woman gave an offering too. She dropped _____ coins into the treasury. They were not worth nearly as much as the money dropped in by the _____ men.

Jesus said, "I tell you _____ when I say that this poor _____ has really given more than the others. They have given out of their _____ They still have some money left. She gave _____ the money she had."



W	M	E	X	C	R	A	L	N	S	G	T	I	U	V	W	E	M	W	P	H
S	Write letters of words below to see a special message. Begin with the W under the arrow. Skip every other letter. _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____																			Q
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Q	A	T	T	O	W	D	E	J	H	E	A	H	V	D	T	T	E	D	V	H	A	E	M	J
S	S	L	U	H	S	F	E	S	J	M	E	J	S	F	A	Y	E	V	L	I	P	H	O	L

The METROPOLITAN
COMMUNITY CHURCH of
the NORTHEAST DISTRICT

"on STEWARDSHIP as an element
in the Church's spiritual life"

This paper, requested by the District Coordinator is offered to stimulate discussion at District meeting and in home Churches. It is offered more as a model and a point of departure than as a blueprint (however it may read) because inevitably a sound stewardship emphasis needs to be a spiritual ministry by and in the local congregation.

On the other hand, our communion with each other is reinforced to the degree that we can make a common approach to a common concern.

Gilbert H. Lincoln, MCC/NY

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; 13 - 16 February, 1976

for the METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH of the Northeast District
Philadelphia, Peena; 13 - 15 February 1976

Gilbert H. Lincoln, MCC/IV

These are some notes on stewardship as a process, a program, and, above all, a facet of the Church's spiritual life. They are offered in hope they will prove helpful, more as a foundation or a point of departure than as a pattern.

ghl-

WHAT IS STEWARDSHIP? First we may have to say what it is not: it is emphatically not the same thing as fundraising. Most Churches will need and want to do both things, but it is primarily important that they not be confused or mixed.

STEWARDSHIP is the grace of thankful love in action; it is a form of planning, of emphasis and of action which encourages and helps persons and congregations devote their time, their talent and their treasure to the work of God.

We will be speaking of it largely in terms of the stewardship of money, but we need always to bear in mind that, inas much as we seek to orient the whole of life to the love and service of God, we must always also have in mind the stewardship of time and talent.

OUR OBJECTIVE is the ministerial and evangelical endeavor to interpret to Christians what God says in the Bible and to help those same women and men organize their lives more and more joyously and effectively around their communion with Christ, helping them grow in grace toward true evangelical charity. We are not seeking to set up a piece of Church machinery or program subordinate to other administrative considerations

We want to make faith and faithfulness primary. Stewardship means working out in personal and corporate life the faith which upholds us. Thus stewardship is always a process of making commitment to the God who keeps covenant, and of exercising that commitment in the context of living before and with the God of personal and corporate history and circumstance. Stewardship means living out our faith in the Lordship and Providence of God.

The FOUNDATIONS of STEWARDSHIP ARE BIBLICAL

The UFMCC understands the Old Testament to teach tithing as God's own commandment. It was an insight into the Will of God which grew and developed throughout the centuries until in the New Testament the commandment about tithing came to be understood as a sense of the stewardship of all of life. The same process of growth is to be expected of persons and congregations, and is to be directly encouraged and helped.

The Old Testament understanding is that the firstfruits of all increase belong to God in a special way. Israel's growing recognition and acquaintance with God was rooted partly in the sense that it is the Divine who gives the fertility upon which life depends. God the Author, Fountain, Giver of life, whose claims upon that life are absolute, but which are gracefully levied upon humanity in terms of a portion only to be directly sacrificed. The antique worship of deities of fertility in earth and animals was borne forward through time to culminate in the worship of the Living God who ordains the life and fruitfulness of all creation. Thus it was not only the firstfruits of the earth which belonged to God at harvest time, but so also did the first-born of the herds and flocks. So supremely did the first-born of the human family. That last idea emerges into the New Testament in the wholly new context of God's salvation to

newness of eternal life through an Only-begotten, a First-born, through whose sacrifice to God redemption is purchased once-for-all by Blood.

The Old Testament calls for a wide variety of sacrifices of atonement and thanksgiving. The Levitical prescriptions are elaborate. But it is the tithe as the idea of the tenth which belongs to God which is fundamental in Christian stewardship. The tithe is the firstfruits of increase, the tenth devoted before anything else is enjoyed or used. Thank-offerings in a Christian context take on a special significance in growth as being the ground for special acts of charity and continuing works of righteousness, precisely because in the Christian life such things are seen as themselves being another kind of firstfruits of the Spirit, as liberties and possibilities which inhere in salvation but are never the conditions of salvation. So also in the Christian view the tithe itself becomes no longer a law but a primary form of thanksgiving. We stress that we are saved by grace through faith, not at all by works of the law; yet it is when we are saved and are filled with Holy Spirit that we become able in Christian freedom to fulfill the holy law in spirit and in truth, truly able to love and to give and to do.

In the New Testament we learn from the parables of the Lord Jesus that not only the good things of life, but its most urgent demands also, indeed the entirety of life, is to be received and lived as by a faithful servant, a "steward," of the absent Lord who will surely return, may do so at any moment, and who will require an accounting. Decisions about the commonplace stuff of living are decisions about the Kingdom. We learn in the New Testament that unless life and its opportunities and demands are so received, possessions may become perilous distractions, may become encumbrances. It seems to be the emphasis of Jesus that all such encumbrances must be put by in the name of the urgent demands of the Kingdom. While a millenarian note has consistently rung in the Church's understanding, the fundamental teaching has been shaped (already in the New Testament) that it is the love of money which is the root of all evil. In our own time we have heard new formulations of a realised eschatology, suggesting that the ethic of Christian living and decision-making are predicated upon life lived "as if:" an ethic of life lived as if one were already in the Kingdom which is already come though not yet fully manifest.

The whole key to the New Testament understanding is always the image of the good steward, the one who out of faithful love and clear knowledge of the Lord's will, prudently cares for what belongs to the Lord so as to be able to return not only the initial deposit but an increment with it.

From the totality of Biblical teaching we derive a teaching about discipleship, ethics and stewardship which involves several features. We stress the tithe, then, not merely as a method but as a fundamental affirmation of and response to the Lordship of God. The tithe is the acknowledgement that all is God's. It is not that God wants or needs the objects we have to offer, but God desires the acknowledgment of our faith. The need is our own, not God's. We need to offer to God, to give, as an expression of our total self surrender. We stress stewardship as a mode of self understanding and a way of discipleship sanctioned by the Messiah. We shape our purposes, hence our decisions, in terms of what we understand by faith of God's purpose. We live in this world as citizens of the Kingdom, and we look expectantly to grow in the grace of true charity, which is nothing else than the self-giving love shown by God in Christ - the love which considers not itself, gives no thought to deserving, but always pours itself forth in compassion and benevolence.

PART II Stewardship involves both budget-making and interpretation. It is both program and process. Unless the two interpenetrate and fulfill each other, there is no true stewardship.

Stewardship in budget-making is operational in that it requires some particular kinds of action and planning around the specifics of individual and congregational life.

Committee structure and the locus of responsibilities are crucial. A treasurer alone can rarely do a whole job. There normally need to be several persons sharing defined responsibilities for record keeping, projections of incomes and expenses et cetera. It's a good idea to be sure that the persons involved are not laden with other significant responsibilities.

As will pappear, it is necessary first to know some facts about the income levels and giving patterns in the congregation. That might entail surveys. It almost certainly entails stressing the use of envelopes or checks by as many donors as possible, not because the envelope comports a pledge -- we ought never to give the impression that it does! -- but because it enables the keeping of accurate records of individual giving levels. That information must always be the foundation of realistic projections of income as well as of a realistic endeavor to encourage and measure growth in giving

A variety of systems are available through Hubbard Press (Richmond, Va) and other publishers which are coherent in that the incorporate a pattern of envelopes (use the dollar or check size only), one-write record keeping which yields quarterly statements and permanent record, and schemes for discerning the patterns hidden in the records of weekly gifts.

Budget making takes on its true stewardship character, however, inasmuch as it is an exercise in planning, hence in stating the Church's goals and priorities. Unless those are clear, there is no adequate basis for sound stewardship interpretation. Such planning must have direct liaison to Board and Pastor, but they cannot do the job themselves. At least, they never do. What has to be done in the most elemental sense is to show first what is now happening and in parallel what the Church wants to happen at stated times in the future. That means that good budgets need to show proportionalities more intently than dollar and cents numbers. Such categories might include costs of: pastoral and staff ministry, denominational obligations, rent and space, mail, phone, supplies and other costs of in-Church communication and administration, worship and music and guest appearances, supplies for evangelism and Christian education and so on. Usually there ought not to be more than five or six such categories. If there are people will not see the pattern of Church life and growth in the budget. The categories also give a basis for periodic and brief reporting of how actualities relate to plans in allocating the Church's resources. Such categories also ought to be used to show forms of income: pledges, envelopes, cash, money-raising, special gifts, savings or reserve accounts, etc.

Fundamentally a budget is a key tool in Church planning and in measuring performance against intention. And it is a tool of interpretation to persons who need, as stewards, to budget and plan their own living and resources in terms of proportionality.

Don't fall into the trap of seeking subscriptions to a budget! Seek giving as stewardship, and use the budget as a tool of planning and interpretation.

Stewardship in interpretation is fundamentally a kind of consciousness raising. It is not a means for inducing people to do something they might not do otherwise. It cannot be gimmicky and succeed. Neither can it be demanding.

One part of the Stewardship Committee needs to be the Treasurer and the persons doing the work discussed on page 3. The other part of the Committee needs to be a totally separate group. A Fund-raising Committee can be a third element if fund-raising is being considered (and do we ever think of much else?)

The interpretation group needs to work most intimately with the Pastor, because it is their duty to relate sermon material to other parts of the Church life in Bible study and Sunday school, in men's and women's raps, in newsletters and other communications, in inquirers' classes and membership training, and everywhere else an opening can be found.

There is a lot to say and to show and it must be done as part of all else the Church does. It must never concern itself only with financial stewardship but must always emphasise also stewardship of time and talent. What we want to put across is our understanding of the Bible and the UFMCC and the spiritual life in terms of persons' life priorities and decisions and plans.

We might, for instance, encourage rap groups to have sessions on how personal financial life can be organised to yield greater liberty and satisfaction. That is only one example of seeking and finding occasions to interpret what stewardship is. Each Church needs to find its very own.

Good interpretation never discusses the size of a person's gift, but always and forthrightly speaks about the proportionality of that gift to the rest of the life and about its relative priority among other things. Our aim is to stress growth in a step-by-step way to greater proportion in the direction of the tenth, the tithe. And we want to stress that God's claim is primary absolutely. To do so successfully we dare not be preachy but must be exemplary and helpful in concrete ways.

For example, the Church through the Board and Pastor ought to set a standard, saying, in effect, "The Bible and UFMCC teach tithing. In order to grow to that, we set a self-expectation goal of (say) $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ of disposable income this year; and next year that will be $3\frac{1}{2}\%$, and the year following 5%, and so on. People will welcome a standard when they will resent being told what to do. So it is important to offer various ways of calculating what one has to work with: eventually gross income, of course; but first, perhaps, adjusted gross income as on income tax, or perhaps income after deductions for any unusual and special obligations. It may even be useful to speak in concrete terms of costs of smoking or drinking or clothes in order to show what we mean by proportionality and priority. What is necessary is a keen sense of the local congregation! Our object is to show people that we understand what we're talking about and that we understand the realities of their lives and can help them bridge the chasm between where they are and where they will learn to want to be without incurring guilty feelings.

Stewardship does not omit the unemployed, those on welfare, the poor, or anyone else. We don't stress how much, and we don't stress what's missing: we speak of faithful use of what one has, much or little, whatever it be. We speak of percentages, not of dollars in stewardship, of proportionality and of priority. And we teach people how to be systematic and regular in making their commitments and carrying them out. We know and we say that growth in the grace of stewardship is life-long.

PART III: Some notes on procedures

1.) The first step is of primary importance: it is to secure the understanding and the long-term commitment of Pastor, Board of Directors, Convener of the Committee and other key persons to a continuing stewardship emphasis and interpretation. Then it is highly desirable to procure the Congregation's approval at a meeting, not going into much detail but asking that stewardship be set as one of the few really top priorities in Church life and planning.

2.) Actual Committee structure is the next step. Recognise you need 2 or even 3 subcommittees, as above, but all under one Convener who is not the treasurer, each operating on its own but in a coherent, mutually understanding way. Do not make the committee too large. Avoid using people who have wide commitments elsewhere in Church life, but frankly ask of them the same top priority commitment the Congregation has made. Assign roles and responsibilities in a clear, limited way so that each one knows what is expected and how that work fits other people's.

3.) Begin, then, with both analysis of patterns of giving and expenditure and of the spiritual basis and dimensions of what is to be done. Pray. Don't hurry but be thorough. Let the 3rd section on fund-raising proceed as usual with only one new proviso, that all their projects, without a single exception, will be clearly planned and carried through as much for the fellowship of the work as for the money to be realised. Their work will get in the way, and you'll fall back into old habits, unless they and everyone else understand that fund-raising is no substitute for stewardship but is a way of letting people rejoice in working together for a clear objective, each one learning therein about stewardship of time and skill.

4.) When you think you're ready, at the Board level raise the question of what our local standard of self-expectation is going to be for the incipient year and for each of at least the next three. Remember, you are not telling what to do, but how; you are providing a measure-stick for growth and progress; you are illustrating what long-term commitment means. Before you publish this decision,

5.) Be ready, and have secured the cooperation of group leaders, so that you can use discussion and mailings and sermons and special programs to help each person see how s/he can see what s/he is doing and make a responsible and spiritual commitment to proceed step by step toward an own goal in giving. This is only a little less crucial than #1 above. If you cannot or do not show how, your whole effort will fail. And remember, you never talk dollars, you always talk proportion and priority.

6.) While the interpretation section is doing #5, the treasurer's section is doing the work of planning a budget of priorities and proportions which the Board and Congregation can adopt. Remember, the Budget is not what you'll ask people to support. You'll ask them to support a plan of step by step growth in specific, clear terms along a definite time line.

7.) Now you're about ready to seek pledges. You are sure you have a paper and record system which will help, not hinder. You have a clear spiritual policy and a clear budget of purposes to interpret. You have done some homework helping persons discover how each one can calculate his/her own present life plan and pattern and how to proceed step by step to a new level of commitment. Unless all this is really ready, hold off on pledge procurement. Finally, be sure fund-raising projects are in abeyance for at least 6 weeks before you begin and after.

- 7.) At this point your Pastor and staff, the editor of your newsletter and other key program people will be ready to coordinate the appeal for pledges. You will now want one new instrumentality, a telephone committee. They will have names and numbers for section 1's previous work (or office files), will consist of enough persons so that each can phone 5 or 6 others at least once to advise them of mailings they'll receive and of the date of pledge dedication.
- 8.) After round one of telephoning, mail out the budget in a readily comprehensible form, with a letter of appeal, and a mail-returnable pledge card. Of course services of worship will support the endeavor. Round two of telephoning follows the mailing and comes about a week before pledge dedication time, reminding, encouraging.
- 9.) On pledge Sunday you add the pledges received by mail to those then made, dedicate them thankfully in a spiritual emphasis. You have stressed that late arriving pledges are or will be incorporated in the same devotion.
- 10.) Now it's time to start all over for next year, while you keep working with the results of your first effort.

\$100,000.00
47MCC budget

Ethical Question

? Marijuana dealer who tithes -

? Hustler

~~Redemptive transformation~~

The Metropolitan Community Church of Boston

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Dear

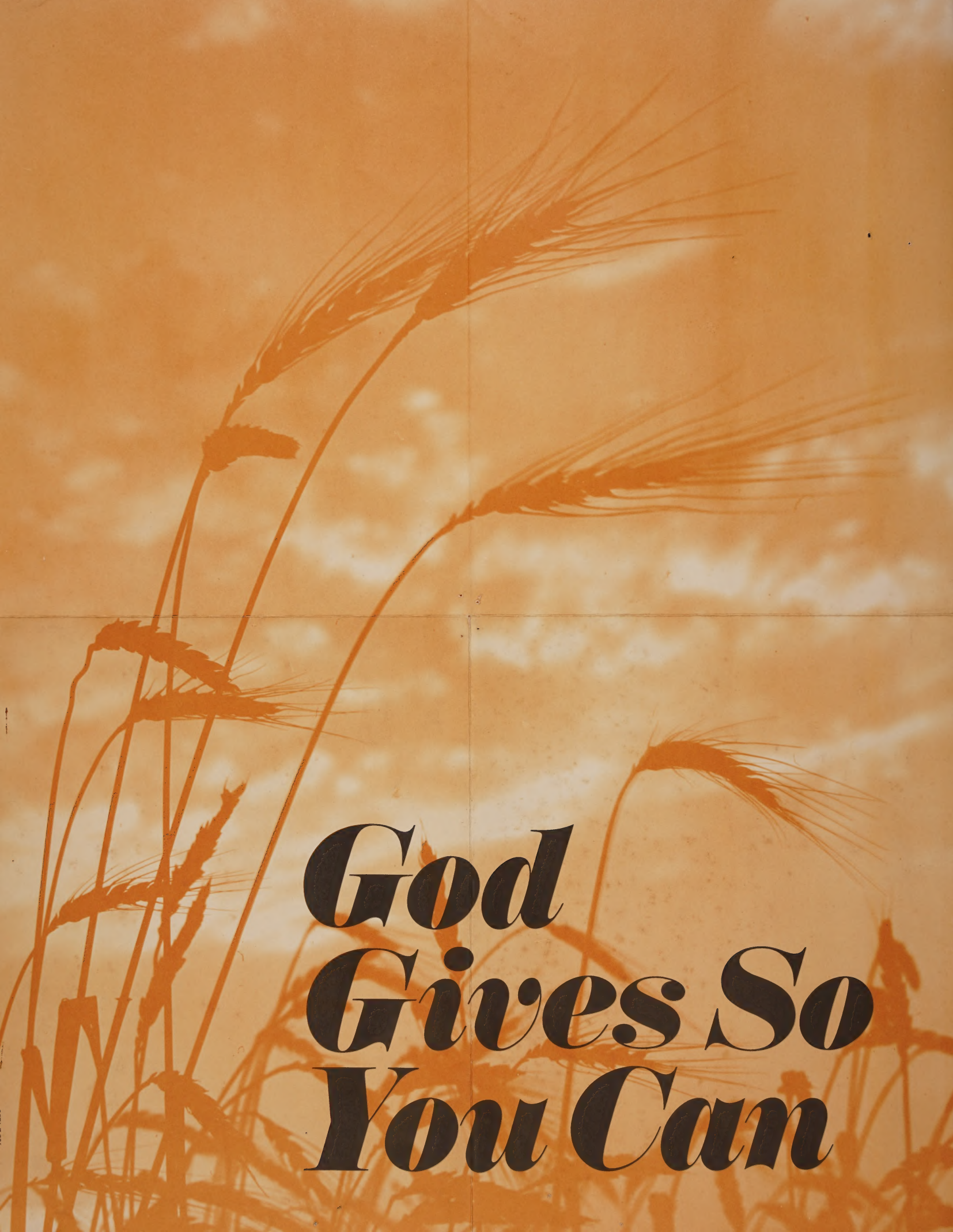
Thank you for your continuing support of MCC Boston and its continuing work in Special Ministry and Outreach in our Community.

I do want pledge envelopes ☐ I do not want pledge envelopes ☐

Signature _____

**Please Note: Our Pledge Year is now beginning as of October 1, 1977 through October 1, 1978.*

I wish to Pledge \$ _____ per week or an annual gift of \$ _____.



***God
Gives So
You Can***

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YOU
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